

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ANIMAL WELFARE LISTENING SESSION

Afternoon Session

Wednesday, March 23, 2005

2:06 9.m.

U.S. Department of Agriculture
12th & Jefferson Drive, SW
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
Room 107A
Washington, D.C.

P R O C E E D I N G S

Opening comments of Under Secretary Bill Hawks
(Not on the record.)

MS. LEAHY: So, the first person on the list is Brenda Piper, to be followed by Margaret Snyder, thank you.

MS. PIPER: My name is Brenda Piper and I represent the American Federation of Agriculture. AFA recommends that inspections not be a prerequisite of licensure. There is no requirement itself for inspections. In fact, the AWA in 2.146(A) suggests that inspections be conducted for investigations potential violations. Not requiring inspections as a prerequisite for licensing clearly meets the requirements of 2.133 of the AWA, which requires only that the applicant demonstrate that the facilities comply, not that these facilities be physically inspected.

Inspections of establishments should only be conducted on an as-warranted or as-necessary basis, as determined by the USDA. There is precedent for such a proposal: Under the Captive Bred Wild Life Registration Program of the Endangered Species Act, applicants are required to photograph, diagram, describe, and otherwise explain the premises, housing, experience and general background of the keeping and keeper of their ESA regulated birds as a prerequisite to being registered.

The elimination of the requirement for inspections for licensure will make implementation and administration of the AWA regs economically feasible. Under the AWA regulations, the USDA must not jeopardize the security and biosecurity of the birds to be protected. Inspections of premises must be performed with the highest regard for prevention of the transmission of diseases. Owners of animals must be protected from theft of their animals. The names and addresses of licensees or the species of birds must be protected from public access.

To attempt to specifically regulate sizes shapes and materials of housing, types of nutrition or other similarly husbandry practices is unwise, impractical, and potentially dangerous to the birds.

Housing and nutrition should be on an as-appropriate basis for the type of bird kept. AWA regulations must recognize and not discourage and the hand-feeding of birds. Only properly trained USDA staff should be allowed to administer and enforce the AWA as it relates to birds.

USDA should hire at least one and preferably more full-time staff agriculturalists to assist in the review of complex applications and appeals. USDA should be certain that it has adequate funding to administer the regulations and to hire the necessary staff.

Last, the requirement for licensing under the Act should be limited only to those establishments which: 1) receive a substantial portion of their gross income from the sale of birds to the public or people/establishments; and 2)

have more than 20 pairs of birds set up for breeding. Do you have any questions? Thank you.

MS. PICKHARDT: Again the next speaker is Margaret Snyder, to be followed by Richard Lobb.

MS. SNYDER: I just wanted to pay a compliment instead of to offer critical experience. I want to thank Ron DeHaven and Chester Gibson, and, no, they did not pay me to come up here. But we really appreciate the efforts both have made both with regard to harmonization of the regulations and dialogue with the National Institutes of Health with the public health policy. I think it's very important for the research community to get a consistent clear signal from both USDA and Health and Human Services regarding matters of animal welfare and we're very grateful for their efforts. Thank you.

MS. PICKHARDT: After Richard, will be Frank Losky--and forgive me, in advance, if I mispronounce anyone's names, I apologize.

MR. LOBB: Mr. Hawks, I'm Richard Lobb, I'm Communications Director for the National Chicken Council. We're the trade association based here in Washington for the Integrated Broiler Producer Processors and our companies do about 95 percent of the broiler chickens in the United States.

Now, we're not under those laws that you mentioned at the beginning. However, we wanted you to know that NCC has a comprehensive program on animal welfare that's available for adoption by our member companies on a voluntary basis. And I'd like to submit a copy of this program for the record. And I further note that it's available on-line at www.nationalchickencounsel.com.

Our program has been widely adopted within the broiler industry and has been accepted by the Food-marketing Institute and the National Council of Chain Restaurants on behalf of their members, the retailers.

Our program includes components for the hatchery, the feed mill, the farm, the transportation, and processing-plant levels, as well as for breeder operations, and the broader company perspective.

The requirements of the program are tough, but doable and it's backed up by an audit program that has more than 50 specific points that should be checked to see if the company is in compliance with this animal welfare program.

The specific metrics include things such as access to food and water; atmospheric quality; the moisture content of the litter; stocking density; ambulation; lighting; catching; feed withdrawal; holding time and efficacy of stunning and killing, among other points.

Many other requirements are provided, including a very clear statement that abuse of the animals will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

We developed our program with the assistance of leading academic experts in poultry science from across the country, led by Dr. S. F. Bilgili of Auburn University. Our scientific advisors are also available to conduct audits under the program.

To help push this stand within the companies we are currently working with the U.S. Poultry and Egg Association, which, as you know, is the educational and training arm of our industry, to prepare a standard training program on animal welfare, which companies will be able to use, as is or customize to suit their own needs.

The National Chicken Council, Animal Welfare Guidelines and Audit Checklist provides a specific and detailed road map any company can use to reach its goal of assuring that a proper regard for animal welfare is well established within that company in their standard operating procedures. Customers can feel confident that their expectations for animal welfare will be met when this program is in use.

MS. PICKHARDT: Following Frank will be Marilee Menard.

MR. LOSKY: My name is Frank Losky and I'm here on behalf of the Missouri Pet Breeders Association, but I believe I feel comfortable in saying I'm speaking, probably, for representatives from at least responsible pet breeders from 12 other states as reflected by the fact that the Missouri Pet Breeders Association hosted a summit in January and an educational seminar in March and there were representatives from 12 other states. The significance of that is that those 13 states represent well over 50 percent of all the federally licensed dog breeders in the United States.

I got some good news and some issues of concern and some more good news and if I run out of time, I'm going to submit something in writing.

The good news is that in the last two years, the Missouri Pet Breeders Association really has taken a great deal of pride in the fact that it's being recognized as a responsible voice for responsible pet breeders in the United States. And that pride has sort of built upon itself a certain synergism and so they keep trying to out-do what they've done in the past. And I think this is reflected by the summit and the educational seminars they have. And the fact that, just recently, they've met with the new director of agriculture for the State of Missouri in trying to develop emphasis on some educational initiatives.

Issues of concern, I'd just like to mention. Among the federally licensed, responsible pet breeders--and I emphasize responsible--there's a festering concern or perception that there's a lack of uniformity by the inspectors. And I think recent initiatives that have been undertaken show that our voices are being listened to, not

necessarily acting favorably in every instance but, at least we're getting a very favorable receptive audience to our concerns.

And another issue of concern is that some people are almost afraid, for fear of reprisal to appeal for fear that something would be taken advantage of.

I'm running out of time, obviously, and like I said, I'll give additional comments. I want to mention two other quick things: One is that the APHIS center that I know Dr. Gibson has at least surfaced, we, I can speak personally, but I find it fascinating that you've got pet breeders and animal protection groups and no one seems to be right, you know super supportive of the initiative and that tends to suggest sometimes that maybe that's the right idea.

Because the emphasis of the Missouri Pet Breeders Association is on education and they're going to be developing a real program and I would like to use this opportunity to invite all interested stakeholders to participate in something that we could wrap our arms around and, perhaps call it a "Leave No Puppy Behind" program. Thank you.

MS. PICKHARDT: Following Marilee Menard is Steve Kopperud.

MS. MENARD: I'm Merilee Menard, I'm the Executive Director of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums and we're going to be facing a new proposed rule, fairly shortly that's going to be phenomenally expensive. And it's going to fall on the shoulders of approximately 130 marine life parks, aquariums and zoos and many of these facilities will have to go to their states and local municipalities to get money for this. And I just want to remind the Department of Agriculture, it would be wonderful if these rules were necessary, science-based, and identified through systematic, documentation by inspectors. Thanks.

MS. PICKHARDT: Following Steve Kopperud will be Harry Snelson.

MR. KOPPERUD: Secretary Hawks, on behalf of the Farm Animal Welfare Coalition, which is an ad hoc political coalition of many of the nation's largest livestock and poultry producer groups, and the industries which serve them, I want to thank you for the listening session.

To echo Dick Lobb--animal agriculture is not regulated under either the Animal Welfare Act or the Horse Protection Act. But today you're going to hear from some of our coalition members who appear on their own behalf to make USDA aware of the ongoing priority animal well-being enjoys within production agriculture, as well as some of the progressive steps these groups have taken to ensure that priority is a reality.

My message, today, is deals with congressional and regulatory challenges from the animal rights movement we foresee coming in the next two years. These predictions are

based on failed animal rights initiatives in the past Congresses and administrations, which always seem to resurface; as well, as agendas of several prominent organizations.

The following initiatives are designed to restrict animal production, either through direct impact on farmers, ranchers, or processors or on retailers, including restaurants, fast-food chains, and supermarkets. Some will be frontal attacks; others may be animal rights support for environmental or so-called food-safety initiatives brought by other groups.

The next farm bill will be a major legislative target for several animal rights initiatives. However, any or all of the following initiatives can be expected, some as free-standing legislation; others as amendments to appropriations or other bills. Most will appear on Capitol Hill, at the same time being battled in state legislatures.

Some of the challenges we see--the bill's already introduced: to make horse slaughter illegal, H.R.-503 applying to all horses and 297 and S-576 applying to wild horses. Further restrictions on animal fighting and industries which serve animal fighting. A push for the U.S. during GATT negotiations to commit to bring it's animal production, transport, and handling systems in line with EU practice, including expected OIE production standards and recommendations.

Amending the Animal Welfare Act to bring all species, including food production, under the scope of the AWA, including research. Amending the Humane Slaughter Act or new legislation to include all poultry under Humane Slaughter regulations.

Both legislative and administrative strategies to create federal livestock and poultry transport regulation. A tax on confinement production systems with specific attention on sow and veal stalls.

Legislation to expand and codify downed-cattle rules to apply to all non-ambulatory livestock and to ban them from the food supply.

Efforts to block federal approvals of biotech animals and gene-based assisted reproduction. Efforts to restrict beef pork and poultry purchases by the school lunch program, based on production practices the animal rights movement finds unacceptable.

I want to assure the Department that Animal Agriculture will take appropriate action to ensure our standards of animal well-being are met to benefit both the animal in our charge and the producers who rely upon them for the well-being of their families.

We welcome the opportunity that talk to you about this at any time and thanks again for the session.

(Comments made by Secretary Mike Johanns.)

(Off the record)

MS. PICKHARDT: Next up is Harry Snelson, to be followed by Mary Hanley.

MR. SNELSON: Under Secretary Hawks, on behalf of the National Pork Producers Council, I want to thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and participate in this Listening Session, today.

My name is Dr. Harry Snelson, I'm the Director of Science and Technology for the National Pork Producers Council. I just want to take this opportunity to make you aware of the emphasis the swine farmers place on animal well-being and the environment.

Swine farmers are proud of what they do. No one knows better the importance of properly caring for their animals more than the people who work with them on a daily basis. This is more than a livelihood to them, it's a lifestyle and a chosen occupation. Being a swine farmer's not glamorous. It's hard, often dirty work. Swine farmers do it because they enjoy working with the animals and, at the end of the day, they can be proud they can be proud of the fact that they produced safe, wholesome, food for all our families.

Swine farmers have supported the development of numerous programs to ensure that the environment is protected and that the animals are properly cared for. Some of these programs include the Pork Quality Assurance program; numerous antimicrobial use guidelines; such as the Take Care program; a number of environmental stewardship programs; and the Swine Welfare Assessment Program, or SWAP.

Thank you very much.

MS. PICKHARDT: Mary Hanley, followed by Michael Rybolt.

MS. HANLEY: Good afternoon, Secretary Hawks, I'm Mary Hanley from the National Association for Biomedical Research. I want to thank you, too, for this opportunity to be here today and express our interest and comments.

NABOR, or the National Association, represents more than 300 research institutions in academia, the pharmaceutical and biotech industries, medical and veterinary schools, hospitals, as well as breeders for research.

On behalf of the research community, I would like to express our concern and continuing interest in the agenda of those whose stated goals are to obstruct or halt scientific research with animals, through either legislative, regulatory, or legal challenges and making it either impossible or difficult or just too expensive to pursue this research.

Particularly in the context of the upcoming Farm Bill, which does represent what we recognize as a legislative target for initiatives by some animal rights groups, we'd like to ask that the USDA work closely with the research community to ensure that the statutory requirements of the Animal Welfare Act are fulfilled.

Specifically, pertaining to the exemption of rats, mice, and birds, I'd sort of put this in the form of a question, although I realize it's a listening today, but we'd really like to now and hope that the USDA if they are anticipating making any recommendations to the agriculture committees for statutory changes in the Animal Welfare Act or does the Department believe the current statute is effectively addressing the treatment of laboratory animals.

I'd also like to add that we do appreciate, in the research community, the accessibility of the APHIS staff and organization to our concerns and comments. It's a good and healthy working relationship and we appreciate it. Thank you.

MS. PICKHARDT: Next up is Michael--I'm afraid to say your last name again, because I think I may have--may have really messed it up. After Michael will be James Holt.

MR. RYBOLT: Under Secretary, thank you from everyone for allowing us to come here today. I'm Michael Rybolt, I'm representing the National Turkey Federation. Briefly, the National Turkey Federation is an advocate for all segments of the U.S. turkey industry. We provide service and conduct activities which increase demand for our members products and protect and enhance the ability to effectively and profitably provide wholesome, high-quality and nutritious turkey products.

The number one priority for the industry is to provide the safest and highest quality products as possible. And, therefore, we find that it's essential for the industry to ensure that the well-being of the turkeys we raise is taken appropriately; whether it's on the farm or in the processing plant, the turkey industry acts responsibly raising, breeding, transporting, and processing of all turkeys.

The turkey industry has long held the appropriate treatment of turkeys is vital or is a vital part of the production. National guidelines have been in place in our industry since the late 1980s. The turkey health and well-being committee as well as a lot of the production committees have carefully examined the NTF animal care guidelines and have determined that they are feasible and based on sound science.

We also submitted our guidelines to third-party reviews. We received approval from the Federation of Animal Science Society's Animal Welfare Committee and support from the American Association of Avian Pathologists or AAAP. Their Welfare Committee and their Board of Directors, both endorsed our guidelines. And both organizations, FAS and AAAP, have praised our guidelines as well-written and a model for the industry to follow.

In addition to that, we've also been working with USDA's Ag-marketing Service to enhance the audit tool that is included with our guidelines so that the industry can use

this on an as-needed basis, and we really appreciate their support. Again, thank you for letting us speak, today.

MS. PICKHARDT: James Holt to be followed by Gary Weber.

MR. HOLT: Thank you. Secretary Hawks, I'm Jim Holt, I'm the federal legislative liaison for the American Kennel Club. The AKC was founded in 1884 as a not-for-profit organization devoted to the advancement of purebred dogs. The AKC is the world's largest registry of purebred dogs. We register approximately a half a million of purebred puppies and a million dogs every year.

The AKC also establishes the rules for and sanctions competitive dog events and performance tests. Approximately 16,000 dog events are held annually under AKC rules throughout the U.S. These events attract over 2 million entries annually. We have approximately 5,000 AKC-affiliated dog clubs in the U.S. with a membership of about 250,000 people.

The AKC also maintains and enforces rules pertaining to record keeping and care and condition of dogs which are applicable to persons who register dogs with the AKC. We employ a field staff of full-time investigators which last year made more than 5,000 kennel inspections in the U.S. to ensure compliance with our rules, which is more kennel inspections that were made by the U.D. Department of Agriculture.

The AKC registers litters from purebred sires and dams that meet its registration criteria for both commercial and hobby and show breeders. However, the vast majority of persons who register litters with the AKC are hobby and show breeders. In recent years, more than two-thirds of all persons who register a litter with the AKC, registered only one litter that year and more than 85 percent registered only two litters a year. Litters registered by these small hobby and show breeders account for more than half of all puppies in litters registered by the AKC. On the other hand, persons registering 10 or more litters in a year with the AKC, account for only 2 percent of our litter registrants and only about 20 percent of the puppies in AKC registered litters.

Constituency of the AKC, therefore, is primarily hobby and show breeders, who have committed a significant portion of their lives to breeding, raising, and exhibiting purebred dogs and advancing the quality of purebred dogs in the U.S.

The AKC and its constituency are strongly committed to the humane care and treatment of dogs, responsible breeding of quality dogs and responsible pet ownership. We support the objectives of the Animal Welfare Act and the licensing and regulation of commercial breeders and brokers by the USDA.

At the same time, recognize that there are individuals and groups who seek to unduly restrict the

ability of persons to breed, own, and enjoy purebred dogs and who seek to redefine the relationship between humans and animals. Unfortunately, these individuals and groups often advocate expanding laws and government regulations and policies to further their objectives in the name of animal welfare. We strongly oppose their efforts to use government to impose an extremist animal welfare and animal rights agenda. And we also strongly oppose efforts to redefine all dog breeding as commercial activity and to undermine the essential amateur and hobbyist status of the sport of purebred dogs.

The AKC believes it is not the role of the federal government to be a national humane agency or a control agency to but strike a balance between public oversight and individual freedom which is appropriate for the federal government. Since I'm out of time, I'm going to give you my written statement. And let me merely say that two points that this emphasizes are: one, the fact that we feel there is some need for strengthening of the enforcement tools of the Department of Agriculture; and, second, we're very concerned about the growing problem of animal imports and we have some comments for you on that. And I'll wait, since this is a marked up copy and give you a clean copy afterwards. Thank you.

MS. PICKHARDT: Gary Weber, to be followed by Janet Riley.

MR. WEBER: Good afternoon, Under Secretary Hawks, Dr. DeHaven, and Dr. Gibson was at a meeting I was at yesterday and did a great job of discussing animal welfare center.

The issue of animal well-being is a prominent issue for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. We've worked for about five years to develop a set of animal care guidelines that were just approved this February by our Executive Committee. And it's the result of a lot of work and a lot of experts and a lot of producers who sat down together to work out a set of science-based guidelines, pass through the filter of what's practical and feasible on farms and ranches in the United States, given the dramatic geographic distribution and differences around the country. And then, certainly taking into account the numbers.

With almost a million cattle producers in the U.S., it's a challenge to begin working on an education initiative but we're going to take that on. There's over 600,000 cattle producers with less than 50 head. But we know their commitment to animal care and well-being, they show that day in and day out; winter, summer and fall, and we're committed to working with them to make sure that we have a set of science-based guidelines.

We've worked with the National Council of Chain Restaurants, Food Marketing Institute, and many other organizations to make sure that they know, this is our

responsibility and we take that very seriously. We know best how to care for animals and we're going to enhance our ability to do that through these initiatives.

This will be built upon our beef quality assurance program, which has been an excellent model and example of proactive, effective, industry leadership to address issues and concerns and solve them. So, we'll keep you informed of that--those developments, and any time you want to take a look at what we're doing and get a snapshot, we'll be glad to share that with you.

And thank you, again for providing this opportunity.

MS. PICKHARDT: Janet O'Riely, to be followed by Jen Obernier.

MS. RILEY: I like the O'Riley, it's just Riley.

MS. PICKHARDT: Sorry, I added that in, St. Patrick's day was just last week.

MS. RILEY: Good afternoon, I am Janet Riley with the American Meat Institute and my organization takes the live animals that my colleagues produce and we process them into meat, that's something that makes some people uncomfortable. It's something of which I am very proud.

To you read the newspapers or some organizations press releases, you might not realize the good things that are going on in our industry. The fact is, we've got a demonstrated commitment to animal welfare that I'd like to detail for you briefly.

Humane handling is not new to us. We had a Humane Slaughter Act in 1958 for meat sold to federal feeding programs. And in 1978, that was expanded to cover all meatpacking plants. So, USDA inspectors are in our packing plants at every minute of operation.

1991 was a critical year for us because we developed our first recommended animal handling guidelines, written by Dr. Temple Grandin. And those guidelines were widely implemented.

But in 1997, after she did a survey of plants for you at USDA, she advanced the idea that animal welfare didn't have to be subjective, it could be measured using objective criteria. We supported her idea and we ask her to write an audit program for us. And there were plenty of raised eyebrows back then, because a lot of people said, are you going to count moos? And, yes we were, and yes, we do.

Now that audit program has evolved into a global standard for measuring animal welfare in meatpacking plants and it consists of measurable objective criteria for cattle, calves, pigs, and sheep. And the guidelines are used by restaurant and retail chains as a condition of business. They're endorsed by the Food Marketing Institute and the National Council of Chain Restaurants.

They are used as the basis for certification under the Certified Humane Program; they're featured in the New

York Times best seller "Animals in Translation," and they were featured on "PrimeTime Live" last Thursday night.

We updated the guidelines just this year and they're available and free on our dedicated Website animalhandling.org.

We've also been innovators in training. We developed the first conference dedicated to animal handling in the meatpacking industry and we had nearly 300 people with us in Kansas City in February.

In 2002, despite even greater progress, our Board declared animal welfare a noncompetitive issue. So, today our member companies open their plants to one another and share ideas for the good of livestock.

Data collected by Dr. Grandin shows sustained and dramatic improvements as a result of these efforts. The fact is, good animal handling makes good business sense. It's good for animals, good for employees and it results in better quality meat.

We appreciate existing federal oversight of animal welfare in our plants and we believe it is sufficient. When coupled with our voluntary programs, we're confident that animal welfare in our plants is as good as it ever has been and will continue to improve.

We hope to sustain good communications with you about animal welfare and we pledge our continuing commitment to voluntary efforts that are scientifically sound.

We appreciate your desire to listen to us and to work to separate fact from rhetoric. Thank you.

MS. PICKHARDT: Jen Obernier, to be followed by Bill LaForge.

MS. OBERNIER: Good afternoon, Thank you for the opportunity to update yourselves and the audience on the activities of the Institute for Laboratory Research.

My name is Jennifer Obernier and I'm project director with the Institute., ILAR is a unite of the National Academy of Sciences. We provide independent, science-based advice on issues related to the humane use of animals. This occurs through a committee process that results in reports such as "The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals," which then became the basis for PHS policy and ALAC accreditation.

We place a high priority on making sure to have a balance of views on our committees which do include industry experts.

I'd like to update you very quickly on a couple projects we have going on. We currently have a project that we expect to result in a report released this summer on guidelines for the humane transportation of laboratory animals. The purpose of this report is to address problems associated with the transportation, including animal welfare; availability of services; regulatory oversight; and permitting problems.

We have several projects which we are attempting to develop funding for and establish broad-based support, both with USDA and industry groups. They include the recognition and alleviation of distress in laboratory animals and which NIH is generously funding to a large extent. Another one is recognition and alleviation of pain in laboratory animals.

The purpose of these reports will be to develop general guidelines and examples to aid IACUC [ph] members, investigators and staff in making decisions about protocols using laboratory animals.

Two other reports that we are proposing to develop in the next year is identification of data gaps for generation of science-based guidelines. The committee will summarize current U.S. and proposed European guidelines and identify gaps in the scientific knowledge or data that currently serve as the basis for these guidelines.

The final project that I'd like to tell you about is guidelines for threatened use of recombinant DNA and infectious agents in animal experiments. And the purpose of this report will be to promote safety in the conduct of infectious disease and recombinant DNA research that involves the use of animals.

I have literature both on the Institute for Laboratory Research and on the some of the projects, if anybody's interested, you can see me afterwards. Thank you very much.

MS. PICKHARDT: And the last speaker signed up is Bill LaForge.

MR. LaFORGE: Do I get triple time? Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here and having us here today, we appreciate that very much. I'm Bill LaForge and I'm general legislative and government relations counsel for the American Kennel Club, AKC. And along with my colleague Dr. Jim whose already spoken, primarily on general perspectives relating to animal welfare, my purpose, nevertheless, is really to address one specific of concern to our organization and to the purebred dog fancier. And it relates to APHIS and the animal care unit.

This issue which will become or is familiar to both of you all, because we've had conversations with each of you this past year and we appreciate our accessibility and your consideration, deals with the requirement in the 2000 Air-21 legislation that requires the Department of Transportation and carriers, actually, to report incidents involving the loss, injury, or death of household pets during air travel.

That same legislation required DOT to cooperate with you all at USDA and to enter into an MOU with you. To date, that has not occurred. And we have worked very hard trying to get DOT to understand our side of the case here and deal with issues of effective implementation--making the requirements reasonable for industry, both our recipients of the services out there, as well as the carrier's role.

Unfortunately, at DOT, we've been totally ignored, contrary to our wonderful reception at USDA. The DOT final rule, I must tell you is extremely poorly drafted; it's ambiguous; it is inconsistent with the statute; if it sounds like a lawyer, that's because I am. And you get my drift. I will submit the rule, the paper for all the rest of the reasons it's bad.

It is ill-conceived because it really will create, we fear, further incentives for air carriers to restrict or totally eliminate the carriage of dogs and other pets. It will require them to place into being a tracking and information system that will be very burdensome and, frankly, that goes beyond the need for any sort of a care. It's an overkill.

For example, in 2001, following the implementation of AIR-21, the FAA put in place a consumer complaints system for carriers who deal with animals. And in the total year of 2005, out of 5,863 complaints, four were about animals.

The air carriers out there--and we're not here carrying their water for them today--but you need to know are in very perilous financial straits, as many of you know, they're losing money and many of them are turning down the opportunity to become part of carriers. Imagine the problems we're going to have if this continues. Can you imagine Westminster without dogs and the havoc that would be wreaked with travel to New York.

So, this is something we're very serious about. It is an issue that we hope you will look carefully at. And we're today to ask for this request and that is if you all will work with DOT and not sign an MOU until they work with industry and work with us to ensure that there are fair and reasonable regulations in place. Thanks again for your time.

[Whereupon, at 2:47 p.m., the session concluded.]